We claim:

1. A surgical probe, comprising:

a relatively short shaft defining a distal portion and a proximal portion; and

an inflatable therapeutic element associated with the distal portion of the shaft.

2. A surgical probe as claimed in claim 1, wherein the relatively short shaft is relatively stiff.

3. A surgical probe as claimed in claim 1, wherein the relatively short shaft is malleable.

4. A surgical probe as claimed in claim 3, wherein the proximal portion of the relatively short shaft is stiffer than the distal portion of the relatively short shaft.

5. A surgical probe as claimed in claim 1, wherein at least a portion of the inflatable therapeutic element comprises micropores.

6. A surgical probe as claimed in claim 1, wherein the inflatable therapeutic element includes a distally facing energy transmission region.

7. A surgical probe as claimed in claim 6, wherein the energy transmission region is annularly shaped.

8. A surgical probe as claimed in claim 7, wherein the energy transmission region surrounds a non-conductive region.

9. A surgical probe as claimed in claim 6, wherein the inflatable therapeutic element includes a proximally facing non-conductive region.

10. A surgical probe as claimed in claim 1, wherein the inflatable therapeutic element includes an energy transmission region and a non-conductive region and at least one of the energy transmission region and the non-conductive region define a color that visually distinguishes it from the other of the energy transmission region and the non-conductive region.

11. A surgical probe as claimed in claim 1, wherein the inflatable therapeutic element is mounted on the distal portion of the shaft.

12. A surgical probe as claimed in claim 1, wherein the shaft defines a distal end, the surgical probe further comprising:

a needle slidably mounted within the shaft and movable relative to the shaft such that a distal portion of the needle extends outwardly from the distal end of the shaft, the inflatable therapeutic element being mounted on the distal portion of the needle.

13. A surgical probe as claimed in claim 12, wherein the needle comprises a plurality of needles and the inflatable therapeutic element comprises a plurality of inflatable therapeutic elements respectively mounted on the plurality of needles.

14. A surgical probe as claimed in claim 12, wherein the distal portion of the needle defines a preset curvature.

15. A surgical probe system, comprising:

a surgical probe including a relatively short shaft defining a distal portion and a proximal portion and an inflatable therapeutic element associated with the distal portion of the shaft; and

a fluid source operably connected to the inflatable therapeutic element and adapted to maintain pressure within the inflatable therapeutic element at a predetermined level.

16. A surgical probe system as claimed in claim 15, wherein the relatively short shaft is malleable.

17. A surgical probe system as claimed in claim 15, wherein at least a portion of the inflatable therapeutic element comprises micropores.

18. A surgical probe system as claimed in claim 15, wherein the inflatable therapeutic element includes a distally facing energy transmission region.

19. A surgical probe system as claimed in claim 14, wherein the distally facing energy transmission region is annularly shaped.

20. A surgical probe system as claimed in claim 19, wherein distally shaped energy transmission region surrounds a non-conductive region.

21. A surgical probe system as claimed in claim 19, further comprising a pressure sensor adapted to determine the pressure within the inflatable therapeutic element.

22. A surgical probe system as claimed in claim 21, wherein the pressure sensor is associated with the fluid source.

23. A surgical probe system as claimed in claim 19, wherein the fluid source comprises a pump.

24. A surgical probe system as claimed in claim 19, wherein the fluid source continuously infuses fluid to and ventilates fluid from the inflatable therapeutic element.

25. A surgical probe system as claimed in claim 15, wherein the inflatable therapeutic element is mounted on the distal portion of the shaft.

26. A surgical probe system as claimed in claim 15, wherein the shaft defines a distal end, the surgical probe further comprising:

a needle slidably mounted within the shaft and movable relative to the shaft such that a distal portion of the needle extends outwardly from the distal end of the shaft, the inflatable therapeutic element being mounted on the distal portion of the needle.

27. A surgical probe system as claimed in claim 26, wherein the needle comprises a plurality of needles and the inflatable therapeutic element comprises a plurality of inflatable therapeutic elements respectively mounted on the plurality of needles.

28. A surgical probe system as claimed in claim 26, wherein the distal portion of the needle defines a preset curvature.

29. A method of forming a lesion around a body orifice, comprising the steps of:

providing a surgical probe including a relatively short shaft defining a distal portion and a proximal portion and an inflatable therapeutic element associated with the distal portion of the shaft;

inflating the inflatable therapeutic element to a predetermined pressure;

positioning the inflatable therapeutic element adjacent to the body orifice; and

forming a lesion around the body orifice with the inflatable therapeutic element.

30. A method as claimed in claim 29, wherein the step of positioning the inflatable therapeutic element comprises positioning the inflatable therapeutic element adjacent to a pulmonary vein.

31. A method as claimed in claim 29, wherein the step of forming a lesion around the body orifice comprises transmitting energy from the inflatable therapeutic element to tissue associated with the body orifice.

32. A method as claimed in claim 29, wherein the step of forming a lesion around the body orifice comprises heating tissue associated with the body orifice with the inflatable therapeutic element.

33. A surgical probe, comprising:

a hollow needle; and

a therapeutic assembly, located within the hollow needle and movable relative thereto, including a relatively short shaft defining a distal portion and a proximal portion and an inflatable therapeutic element associated with the distal portion of the shaft.

34. A method of coagulating tumor tissue, comprising the steps of:

inserting an inflatable therapeutic element into the tumor; and

coagulating tissue with the inflatable therapeutic element.

35. A method as claimed in claim 34, wherein the step of inserting an inflatable therapeutic element into the tumor comprises the steps of inserting the inflatable therapeutic element into the tumor in a deflated state and inflating the inflatable therapeutic element within the tumor.